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AN
AFTERNOON
IN
ARABIA

BY
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WOMAN'S BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
Reformed Church in America
25 East 22d Street New York, N. Y.

An Afternoon in Arabia

By MRS. L. P. DAME

INTRODUCTION

This little missionary demonstration or playlet using ten characters is intended for use by Endeavor Societies or missionary organizations to convey a picture of every day life in Arabia. To make it more realistic as well as more interesting, it is recommended that costumes and a stage setting be used. Let the refreshments be real and do not hurry over the refreshment part as this is one of the important parts in Arab entertaining. The serving of coffee too is a fine art and time should be taken in the play to do this part well, not hurriedly.

COSTUMES

Missionary ladies—Wear ordinary white or light summer dresses and hats. Carry work bags and crochet or darn stockings etc. as they sit and talk. Wear oxfords or low shoes to be easily taken off.

Arab ladies—(Choose girls with dark hair and eyes.) Wear red or brightly colored kimonos put on backwards to fasten behind to give loose flowing lines. Wear hair hanging down at sides of face in braids. Take a long black veil (or piece of cheesecloth) and wind it around face, beginning at top of head above forehead, down over right ear, under chin, up over left ear and to top of head again letting a long loose end hang down the back. Spread out the part lying on the chest. Use a black or dark colored cape (large) and let it hang from the head covering most of the dress. When seated, let this cape slip down to the shoulders. Wear a long string of bright beads or a coin necklace and bracelets. Bracelets could be made of strips of cardboard two or more inches wide and painted with gilt to represent gold. They are worn in pairs one on each arm. If rings are worn they too must correspond on each hand. They may be worn on three fingers or four and even on the thumbs also. Go barefoot and wear heel-less slippers (bedroom mules are good) which are slipped off at the door each time one enters and slipped into (without the aid of the hands) when leaving the room.

PROPERTIES

The stage settings should represent a room with a door leading out on one side. It should be so arranged that the characters may be seen standing outside the doorway. Place a rug or two along the wall at the back of the platform providing a place to sit. (Do not cover all the platform.) Have large cushions of bright colors placed at the back against the wall. The characters sit on the rug and lean against the cushions. At one side if not too crowded for space there might be a box something like a cedar chest, dark colored if possible. No other furniture. If there are shelves or a windowsill have them cluttered with many ugly old-fashioned glass vases, large Christmas tree globe ornaments etc. Have as many framed mirrors as possible on wall.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

GREETINGS

Arab greetings are very profuse. Stand and shake hands with each guest going through the regular formula with each one before shaking hands with the next. The greeter and the greeted speak responsively if not simultaneously and the facial expression may be absolutely wooden, the formula being repeated parrot like.

The greeting runs like this,—Greeting and response.

Peace be upon thee. And upon thee be peace.

God give you a good morning. God give you a good morning.

(or afternoon as the case may be.)

How are you? Praise the Lord.

Are you well? The Lord give you life.

How are your people? The Lord give you peace.

How are you? Well? The Lord give you life.

FORM OF MOHAMMEDAN PRAYER

Spread a small mat or rug (2 by 3 ft.; or so) in front on floor. Face west (if not feasible on stage an oblique forward position would show to best advantage.)

1. Stand, clasping hands one over the other, arms not raised, move lips as if repeating prayer (two or three minutes). 2. Bow forward twice (from hips). 3. Kneel and from this position bow forward touching forehead to rug twice. Between these prostrations move lips as before.

Repeat 1, 2 and 3 in order five times.

At the end while kneeling hold out both hands palms up and raise eyes to heaven; then turn head first to right and then to left and prayers are finished. At this point just before rising let curtain be drawn.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA.

Characters.

Mother of Abdulla—old woman.

Ayesha—first wife of Abdulla.

Fatima—second wife of Abdulla.

Lulu—wife of Abdulla's brother.

Miriam—small daughter of Ayesha.

Mother of Zaid—neighbor, and friend of the missionaries.

Mrs. Black—experienced missionary.

Miss White—experienced missionary.

Mrs. Brown—new missionary.

Beggar—unseen character.

SCENE—An Arab Home.

Opening—Lulu and Ayesha sitting on floor talking.

Lulu—I have just been talking to Fatima. You should have heard what she said about you.

Ayesha—Why, what did she say?

Lulu—Oh, she was telling me things and she made some remarks about you. I guess I'd better not say what she said.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Ayesha—She's a cat. She had better not make remarks about me.

Lulu—She says she's going to have a new dress. Abdulla promised her one. And it's not time for feast day either. She had a new dress for the last feast day too and now another one.

Ayesha—I don't think she will get it. She is only talking.

Lulu—Well, that may be but she showed me the sample. It is fine satin. Why don't you get Abdulla to promise you one too? You are the first wife. Why let her get ahead of you all the time?

Ayesha—(Sullenly) Wait till you have a partner wife.

Lulu—(preening herself) Thank the Lord I haven't. Praise God, my husband still finds me too attractive for him to want another.

Ayesha—Don't be so sure of yourself.

(Enter Mother of Zaid.)

Mother of Zaid—Peace be upon thee. (See note on greetings.)

Ayesha and Lulu—And upon thee peace.

Mother of Zaid—God give you a good morning.

Ayesha and Lulu—God give you a good morning.

(responsively) Q. How are you? A. Praise the Lord. Q. How are you? A. The Lord give you peace. Q. Are you well? A. The Lord give you life. Q. How are your people? A. The Lord give you peace. Q. How are you, well? A. The Lord give you health.

(All seat themselves again.)

(Enter Miriam.)

Miriam—Mama, I want to go out. I want to go to the white ladies' house.

Ayesha—No, not now. They do not want to see you now.

Miriam—Yes, Mama. They are always glad to see me, and I have not seen them for a whole week. I want to go.

Lulu—Silly child, you act as if you like them. What good will they ever do you?

Miriam—I do like them. I love the white ladies. I like to be with them. They never say mean things like you do, Lulu, and they are always so nice to each other. I have been in their houses lots of times and I know. And their medicine cured me when I was so sick, didn't it mama? (teasingly) I want to go.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Lulu—Poof! Look at the dresses they wear! Cheap white cotton! Do you ever see them in gorgeous silks like mine? My old dress of last year's feast is even yet prettier and richer than anything they wear.

Mother of Zaid—Remember, clothes do not count for everything, Lulu. The missionary ladies have kind hearts and they go about doing good. And besides they are very learned. Each one of them knows how to read. You ought to see how many books they have in their houses. And besides reading (impressively) they know how to write! They can write, mind you, as easy as anything, and their husbands do not think it at all strange.

Ayesha—Yes, indeed. They are very clever and they have seen so much of the world!

Lulu—Ha! Ha! Do you believe everything they say? One day they were talking about their country and they said there was green grass and flowers and even trees in everybody's yard! And they said there were buildings there *ten* stories high. Such lies! And they said they did not have to go off to to the springs for water but that in every house there were faucets and one just turned a thing like this (indicating by a twist of the hand) and the water came gushing out. Who would believe such tales?

Mother of Zaid—All countries are not the same. Their country is very different from ours just as they are very different from us.

Miriam—(brightly)—I've seen pictures of their country. The ladies have them. I like to look at them.

Lulu—Fie for shame! Are not pictures forbidden? Praise God, the prophet Mohammed said so.

Miriam—I'm going, mama.

(Exit Miriam.)

Lulu—(reprovingly) There she goes, Ayesha.

Ayesha—How can I help it? She enjoys going there so much.

Lulu—Well all I can say is, if she gets too friendly with them she will lessen her chances of getting married.

Ayesha—Ah, but she is still so little. Let her have some pleasure while she may.

Mother of Zaid—The white ladies say that in their country little girls never get married. They go

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

to school a long time. Why, they think eighteen years old is young to be married.

Lulu—Eighteen years old!! Why, I am seventeen and I have been married three years already. Those infidels are terrible! I tell you, Ayesha, you better look out letting Miriam go there so often. They will teach her their strange customs.

Mother of Zaid—Let her go as often as she likes, Ayesha. They are good friends to have. Look at me, I was married when I was only nine years old and when I think of all the misery I have gone through—(shakes her head sadly). Their way is better than ours. I don't think God means women to be treated as we have been treated and as Moslem women are always treated. You let Miriam be a girl for a good while yet, Ayesha, let her have some pleasure before you bargain for her marriage to anyone. (Enter Mother of Abdulla.)

Mother of Abdulla—Peace be upon thee.

Mother of Zaid—And upon thee be peace.

Mother of Abdulla—(sighing and sitting down) My strength is failing fast. Praise God. I fear that my last day draws near. There is no God but God and Mohammed is his prophet. Each morning I dread the night and each night I dread the morning for fear it will bring the Death Angel.

Mother of Zaid—Why do you not go to the mission hospital and get some medicine? They will tell you how to get well.

Mother of Abdulla—O no. I am not sick but I am old now, and who knows what day the Death Angel will come to an old person?

Lulu—Praise the Lord. God is merciful.

Ayesha—I have heard the Christian ladies say that they are not afraid of death.

Mother of Abdulla—(rising) La, la, such talk. Who can face death without fear? I am an old woman. I am in fear all the time now. Any day may be my last. I must spend much time in prayer for the Death Angel will come soon and I am afraid. (Goes off murmuring) "There is no god but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God."

(Reenter Miriam)

Miriam—O mama, what do you think? There is a new missionary lady come. I am so glad I went to the mission. This new lady came on the last boat and she cannot talk Arabic yet.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Lulu—Ha! Ha! She cannot talk Arabic! Who said the missionary ladies were so learned?

Mother of Zaid—They *are* learned in their own language and then they also learn to speak ours. And they learn to read and write Arabic too. *You* cannot read or write, can you Lulu? And if you went to their country you would not be able to talk either.

Lulu—Poof! Who would want to go to their country? If our country were not better than theirs do you think they would come here?

Miriam—Mamma, you better make some cakes, the ladies are coming here this afternoon.

Ayesha—Here! This afternoon!

Lulu—Pray, who asked them to come here?

Miriam—I did. When I saw the new lady I told them that you all sent her greetings and that mamma sent me especially to invite them for the afternoon so we could welcome her and get acquainted.

Lulu—(glaring at her) You awful child! you need a good beating.

Ayesha—And they said they would come?

Miriam—Yes. At first they said today wasn't very convenient as their work was planned ahead but I told them you wanted them especially this afternoon so then they said they would arrange their work and come so as not to disappoint us.

Ayesha—(sighing) Well—I will go and make some cake. Miriam, go and rock the baby. If you will bring visitors you must do some of the work.

Mother of Zaid—If you do not want them I will take them to my house. I enjoy having the ladies so much.

Ayesha—O. no, that will never do. Let them come.

(Exeunt Ayesha and Miriam)

Mother of Zaid—I must be going now. I shall come this afternoon when the ladies come. Goodbye.

Lulu—Goodbye.

(Exit Mother of Zaid)

(Enter Fatima)

Lulu—O, Fatima, I don't like to tell you but Ayesha was talking against you. She said you were a cat.

Fatima—I don't care what she says.

Lulu—O yes you do. She said more than that too.

Fatima (suspiciously)—What else did she say?

Lulu (airily)—I won't tell you as long as you don't care what she says. But what do you think? Abdulla

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

promised her some new gold bracelets! Why don't you tease him for some? Why should she get new bracelets? You are younger and prettier. (pausing, then with a slight shrug) Perhaps he is tiring of you already.

Fatima (in evident distress)—Oh, don't say that!
(Enter Mother of Abdulla muttering, "There is no god but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God."
Seats herself.)

(A beggar is heard calling at the gate.)

Beggar—(in a slow mournful chanting voice)—Have mercy on me! God keep the head of this house. God recompense you as you show mercy to me. God guard thy family. Have mercy on me!

(Enter Miriam)

Miriam—A beggar is at the gate, grandmother.

Mother of Abdulla—Yes. It is good to give alms, for so the Prophet commanded. I will get some coins. Lulu, have you some?

Lulu—What is the use of giving him anything now? No one is here to see you do it. The mission ladies are coming this afternoon. Why not give your alms then? Run out, Miriam, and tell him to come back this afternoon.

Miriam—Go tell him yourself.

Lulu—Saucy child.

(Beggar calls again)

Beggar—Have mercy on me! God reward you as you show mercy to me! Have pity on me! Have mercy on me!

Mother of Abdulla—I will go and give him some alms now. I might die before this afternoon.

(Exit Mother of Abdulla. Exit Miriam)

Lulu—That Miriam is an awful child. Ayesha lets her do just as she pleases.

(Exit Lulu)

Fatima (rocking herself forward slowly)—Oh! I am so unhappy! How sad is the lot of women! I wonder if Abdulla is really tiring of me!

(Enter Ayesha)

Ayesha—O are *you* here? Say, what business have you talking about me?

Fatima—I talk about you? How dare you call me a cat?

Ayesha—You are perfectly absurd. You have caused nothing but trouble since you came into this house.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Fatima—Am I to blame because our husband wasn't satisfied with you and brought me here? Be glad he did not divorce you.

Ayesha—You needn't put on airs, you hateful thing.

Fatima—Don't talk to me.

Ayesha—Very well, I won't.

(Exit Avesha haughtily)

(Enter Lulu and Exit Fatima with head up)

Lulu (looking after them)—Ha! ha! Just as I planned! They are quarrelling and Abdulla will have no peace. That is well, for then my husband will see how distressed Abdulla is, and perhaps he will think better of marrying a second wife. As long as I can keep him in such a frame of mind I shall have no fears of having a partner wife, ha! ha!

(Enter Mother of Abdulla and Ayesha)

Ayesha—I suppose the mission ladies will be here soon. Here comes Mother of Zaid.

(Enter Mother of Zaid)

Mother of Zaid—Peace be upon thee.

All—And upon thee be peace.

(Enter Miriam breathlessly)

Miriam—Here they come mamma! I saw them coming down the street.

(Miriam runs out to bring them in. Enter Mrs. Black, Miss White and Mrs. Brown stand at the door while Mrs. Black and Miss White remove shoes).

Mrs. Brown—O dear, do we have to take off our shoes?

Mrs. Black—O yes. You see they *sit* on their rugs. They do not walk on them as we do.

Miss White—It would be impolite to dirty up their rugs with our shoes. Besides you will find it more comfortable sitting on the floor without them.

(Mrs. Brown removes shoes. All enter, go through regular greetings (see note), then seat themselves on floor).

Mrs. Brown—Don't they have chairs?

Miss White—There isn't a single chair or table in this whole house. But of course, some Arabs do have a few.

Mother of Abdulla (pointing to Mrs. Brown)—Is that the new Khatoon?

Mrs. Black—Yes, she has just come from America.

Mother of Abdulla—Can't she speak Arabic?

Miss White—Not yet. She will learn by and by.

Mother of Zaid—She must come to see me often. I shall teach her.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Ayesha—How many children has she?

Mrs. Black—She has no children.

Lulu—Is she not married?

Mrs. Black—Yes, her husband is the doctor.

Lulu—Oh! Has he a new wife, besides So-and-so?

Miss White—O my no! We mean the *new* doctor.

There are *two* doctors now. This Khatoon is the wife of the *new* doctor.

Ayesha—(earnestly) Do your men never have more than one wife?

Mrs. Black—No, that is contrary to our religion and our laws.

Ayesha (sighing)—Ah! Yours is the better way. Arabs can have four wives.

Lulu—Yes, poor Ayesha has a partner wife. They do not get along well at all.

Miss White—How is Fatima? Why does she not come in?

Lulu—O, they have had another quarrel.

Miss White (reproachfully)—You know it would be so much better if you would be kind to each other and try to be friends.

Lulu—Huh! Can one be friends with a partner wife? How would you like it?

Mrs. Black—Of course we wouldn't like it but quarrelling I am sure only makes it worse and more unpleasant.

Miss White—Please bring Fatima in. We want to see her too.

Lulu—(stands at the door and calls) Oh Fatima! Hey Fatima! Come here!

(Enter Fatima. Greets Missionaries and sits.)

Mother of Abdulla—(pointing to Miss White's glasses) What are those things on your nose?

Miss White—They are my eye-glasses.

Mother of Abdulla—Are they for decoration? Does your husband then admire such things?

Miss White—I have no husband and these are not for decoration but to help my eyes since they are not so very strong.

Mother of Abdulla—(amazed) You have no husband! Why, your hair is beginning to be gray! Are you really telling the truth? Do you mean to say that no man would pay money for you?

Mrs. Black—That is not our custom. Brides are not sold in our country but a man chooses a wife because he loves her.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

Mrs. Brown—What are they saying? I wish I could understand some of the talk.

Miss White—I shall tell you all about it when we walk home.

Fatima—Why does the new Khatoon not wear glasses too? Are her customs different from yours?

Miss White—Her eyes are strong. Everyone does not need glasses. It is a question of need not a question of custom. Fatima, how is your friend Nura's baby?

Fatima—O did you not know? The baby died.

Miss White—How sad! Why did not Nura bring her to the hospital or let us come with medicine? We could have saved her.

Mother of Abdulla—O no. God wrote it over her that she should die. It is from God. What can man do? What is written is written.

Miss White—God did not write it over her. That baby died of pure neglect; you needn't blame God for it.

Mrs. Brown—I am getting stiff sitting in this position. Isn't it time we were ending our call?

Mrs. Black—O dear no! You will learn that a call is never finished until refreshments are served. They would be quite offended if we attempted to go now.

Miriam—(fingering Mrs. Black's bag) There is something in this bag, isn't there?

Mrs. Black—Yes. Can you feel what it is?

Miriam—It feels like a book, may I look at it?

Mrs. Black—(drawing out a Testament) Yes, you are right. You see it is a book, and it is the Book of God. Shall I read from it for you?

Miriam—Yes. Oh please read.

Lulu—By all means let us hear you read.

Mrs. Black reads Matt. 6-1:24. Gives a short explanation if desired.

During the reading at different times Mother of Abdulla and Lulu mutter, "I ask forgiveness of God for listening to these infidels."

(Exit Mother of Abdulla.)

Lulu—Your book is different from our book and your way is different from our way.

Mother of Zaid—Yes but their way is better than ours.

Lulu—Maybe, but our way is for us and their way is for them. God wrote it over us to be this way.

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

(Rises and goes out with Ayesha for the refreshments
Exit Miriam also.)

Mother of Zaid—I, too, used to think that what happened to us was written over us by God. But now, I do not think so. Oh, Khatoon, I am so happy that I can read a little from the Bible. It is truly a blessed book.

Fatima—O how wonderful to be able to read. I wish I could read too.

Miss White—Can you not come once a week or so for lessons, Fatima? We would be so glad to teach you.

Fatima—Oh! If I only could! But my husband would not let me and my partner wife and Lulu—I dare do nothing—They would tell and perhaps I would get divorced.—(fiercely) Oh! You do not know the lot of poor Mohammedan women! What are we? Nothing but slaves! We know nothing—we go nowhere—we live in dread of abuse or divorce at all times. We are not like you—you are free. You can read and write and do things, your husbands love you always, but we—! It is terrible!
(Hides her face in her hands and weeps.)

Miss White—(putting her arms around her) Yes, dear Fatima, we are free, but it is the truth we know in Christ that makes us free. In our country Christ is honored and His teachings purify life in all its phases. And Fatima, Christ loves you as much as He loves me. He wants you to love Him. He died for the women of Arabia as well as for the women of America. I wish you could come to the mission where we could have a nice long talk together.

Fatima—(hopelessly) O but I couldn't. I wouldn't dare!

Mother of Zaid—Come to my house, Fatima, and the Khatoon can come to my house too and we will read the Blessed Book together.

Fatima—(in alarm) Sh! Here come the others. Don't tell anything I have said.

(Enter Mother of Abdulla)

(Enter Ayesha with tray of refreshments. Sets it on floor in front of missionaries.)

(This may consist of three or four plates on a large round tray. One plate contains small round cakes, (or cookies or Sunshine biscuits) one filled with shelled peanuts or other nuts, one with corn-

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

starch pudding or equivalent consistency to represent "helwa," and one of bananas or canned peaches. All food is reached for by hand, no spoons, etc. The native hostesses pick up a biscuit or a half of a peach etc. and hand it to the guests as well as the guests helping themselves. If there are bananas a native may peel one and hand it minus any skin whatever to one or another of the guests. Always the native hostess is on the alert to see that the guests partake liberally of what she has to offer.)

Ayesha—(squatting down on her heels and waving her hand over the tray) Help yourselves, in the name of God.

(Ladies help themselves using *right* hands.)

Mrs. Brown—(tasting the helwa) O what awful stuff! It tastes like sweetened axle grease!

Miss White—Don't you like it? I am rather fond of it now. At first I did not like it either.

Ayesha—(waving her hand towards the tray) Eat! you are not eating anything! Khatoon, (to Mrs. Brown) Here, take this. (Offers her another share of the helwa in her fingers) Eat.

Mrs. Brown—(taking it gingerly) Must I eat this? Her hands look so dirty all stained with that horrid henna and the taste of this helwa nearly nauseates me.

Mrs. Black—Well, of course, if you *can't* eat it, all right, but they will like it better if you eat it.

(Mrs. Brown swallows it despairingly.)

Ayesha—Eat! you are not eating anything!

(Hands different things to each lady)

Mrs. Black (after eating)—Thank you very much. We have had plenty. Everything is very good.

(Ayesha removes tray and sets it in front of the Arab women who serve themselves.)

(Miriam passes a fingerbowl and towel (not necessarily clean) ladies dip fingers in water and dry them on towel. Tray, fingerbowl and towel are removed.)

(Enter Lulu with coffee, holds coffee pot in left hand and three handle-less cups in her right hand. (tiny bowls or egg cups will do) She pours coffee into the top cup and passes it to Mrs. Black who also receives it in the right hand; the second cup to Mrs. Brown and the third to Miss White. When a cup is emptied it is handed back and Lulu fills it again and returns it, this happens three times,

AN AFTERNOON IN ARABIA

then as it is given back to Lulu it is slightly shaken in the hand and the guest says, "Thank you, enough." Lulu then fills the same cup and hands it to some one else, Mother of Abdulla first, then Mother of Zaid, Ayesha, Fatima and lastly Miriam.)

Miss White—to Mrs. Brown) How do you like the coffee?

Mrs. Brown—It is terribly bitter. Do they never put sugar and cream in it?

Miss White (laughing)—Oh, never!

Mrs. Brown—It has an awful flavor besides being so strong and bitter.

Miss White—That is the "heyl" or cardamon seed. The Arabs love it.

Mrs. Brown—I am afraid I can not drink it all.

Miss White—O try. It will please the Arab ladies. (Mrs. Brown finishes with difficulty and hands back her cup which Lulu promptly refills and returns to her.)

Mrs. Brown—(shaking her head) O no, thank you, no more.

Lulu—What! only one cup? That will never do!
(Insists on giving it to her.)

Mrs. Brown—Oh what shall I do? I simply cannot drink another cup of this wretched coffee. I hate to offend her but it tastes like poison.

Mrs. Black—Well, never mind (to Lulu). Please excuse the new Khatoon, she is not used to Arab coffee yet.

(Lulu takes cup rather huffily and passes it to someone else.)

Mrs. Black—(when all are served) May we be excused now? We have had a very pleasant afternoon.

(All rise. Handshaking and goodbyes are said.)

(Exeunt all except Mother of Abdulla.)

Mother of Abdulla—So it is sunset. Time for prayers. (Takes small rug and goes through the form of Mohammedan prayer.)

Curtain